

The Last Things

Core Activity

Death Is Not the End

1. Instruct the students to write down all the words they associate with death. Ask them to do this in silence. After about 5 minutes, invite them to share a story about losing someone they have loved. If the young people have not lost a friend, a relative, or a pet, they could think about events in the world that would help them to imagine feelings and experiences.

2. Following the sharing, ask the students to offer their responses to these questions:

- Was your experience with death in any way related to the Church? If so, how?
- What do you know about how the Church views death?
- How did the Church's approach to death help you grieve the loss of your loved one?

3. Assure your students that death is indeed a difficult part of life. There is much sorrow and grief associated with death, but there is also hope. Highlight for the students the Church's hopeful approach to death, using material from the sections "The Resurrection of the Dead," "The Final Judgment," and "Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory," on pages 159–165 of *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, Third Edition (CFH)*.

4. Ask the students to write the names of their deceased loved ones on a piece of paper. Also have them write, under each person's name, all the good qualities of that person. If there are young people who have not experienced the death of a loved one, ask them to write down the name of someone they admire and to list the qualities they will remember about that person. Encourage conversation about the characteristics that are written and about how those can lead to someone's being referred to as a saint.

5. Direct the students to write down the names of people who have helped them have faith. Note that those can be people alive today, people they knew who are now deceased, and people alive or dead whose lives they learned about but whom they never knew personally.

6. After a presentation on the Church's teaching on the Communion of Saints, ask the students to review the list of names they wrote down in step 5. Invite them to think about additional people who offer a glimpse into what Jesus modeled for us during his ministry. Tell them to add those people to their lists.

7. Form small groups of four to six students and ask them each to list characteristics of the people who have helped them to have faith. Have the groups report back to the entire class the most important characteristics they discovered and how those relate to our understanding of Jesus. List those characteristics on the board or on an overhead.

8. Conclude by emphasizing that God calls all of us to holiness. Ask everyone to review the list of saintly characteristics generated by the class and to choose one they want to develop more in their own lives. Challenge them to identify two or three specific things they can do during the coming week to help them achieve their goal. Ask them to write those actions on the sheet of paper with the list of people who have helped them have faith, and to take that paper home to help them remember.

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Core Activity Extension

Reflecting on Life and Death

As homework or class work, instruct the students each to write a brief paper or journal entry answering the following questions:

- Think about your relatives who have died. How do they continue to enrich your life? When are you most aware of their spirits remaining with you?
- When you think about the end of your life, what kinds of feelings and thoughts stir in you? Do you imagine God's being with you? Do you imagine that those who have gone before you are with you?
- Imagine your friends and family trying to make a case that you deserve to be canonized as a saint. What do they say about you? What stories of things you have done do they recount?

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Additional Activities

"I Am Saint _____"

1. Before beginning this activity, choose several holy people who are profiled in the *CFH* and decide how you will distribute those among the students. You can assign each student a different holy person, or assign the same holy person to a few students.

2. Point out to the students the saintly profiles scattered throughout the *CFH* and distribute the assignments you determined before the session. Allow about 5 minutes for the students to read their assigned profiles and to prepare to introduce those people to a small group by taking on their identities.

3. Divide the class into small groups. Be sure that various holy people are represented in each group. Ask the students to begin introducing themselves to others in the group as the holy person they were assigned. Remind everyone to speak in the first person (“My name is Blessed _____” or “I am Saint _____”).

4. Ask the groups to identify common themes in the lives of the people they represented, and to list those on a sheet of paper. Tell them to discuss which holy people inspire them and why. After the small groups have completed their lists and discussions, allow time for reporting the common themes to the whole class.

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Prayers for Those Who Have Gone Before Us

Invite the students to compose prayers of intercession for people who have died. They can also include prayers for the families left behind—prayers that those families may find hope in life after death with Christ. Create a book of remembrance and invite the students to add their loved ones’ names to it. Use the intercessions and the book of remembrance as part of a prayer service or school liturgy. (This activity is adapted from Maryann Hakowski, *Sharing the Sunday Scriptures with Youth*, p. 44.)

Media Messages

Invite the students to pay close attention during the coming week to how success is defined by the media. Ask them to record at least the following three things:

- who is being honored or acclaimed
- why that person is being acclaimed
- what person or group is doing the acclaiming

At the end of the week, compile a list of all the people the students have seen honored in the media, and compare those people with the holy people that Catholics acclaim. Also ask the young people to report what they have discovered about the media acclamations. After that sharing, discuss what their findings imply for God’s call to us to be holy.

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Namesaints

Encourage the students to learn about their namesakes. Remind them that saints are not limited to well-known, officially recognized holy people. Some of the students were named after relatives or family friends—perhaps because those people

lead holy lives or made an impact on the students' parents in some way. Encourage the young people to ask their parents how the young people came to have the names they have and, if applicable, who the people are that they are named after. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

Gender and Sainthood

Instruct the students to use Internet or library resources to research issues related to gender and official sainthood. For example, they might compare the number of females and males that have been canonized and compare the qualities of the female saints with those of the male saints. Invite the students each to write a paper sharing the results of this research. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Creed* manual.)

(The material labeled *TC: Creed* is adapted from *Total Catechesis: Catechetical Sessions on the Creed*, by Maura Thompson Hagarty, Michael J. Hagarty, Marilyn Kielbasa, and Barbara Murray, in the Total Catechesis series [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004]. Copyright © 2004 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)

The activity "Prayers for Those Who Have Gone Before Us" is adapted from *Sharing the Sunday Scriptures with Youth: Lectionary-Based Resource for Youth Ministry, Cycle A*, by Maryann Hakowski [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1998], page 44. Copyright © 1998 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)